

Warmwater Fish Management Plan Annual Meeting
Stage Stop Inn
Choteau, Montana
April 11, 2003

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Notes from the meeting and regional summaries will be posted on the FWP webpage.

Fishing Access Sites – Allan Kuser

The Fishing Access Site acquisition program was outlined as follows:

School Trust Site - Located upstream of the mouth of Milk River. Bids opened April 10.

Snowden Bridge Site – We are working on a lease with DNRC and have surveyed the property. We don't yet know what DNRC will charge us for the lease. It will be developed for motorboat access. We have a mandate to get more access on that stretch of river.

Brockton Site – We are working with the City of Brockton to develop a FAS on the Missouri River.

Echo Lake (DNRC site) – A 26 acre site which has been surveyed and we are developing conceptual plans. It will be very expensive to develop because it is a small, steep site and parking will be a problem. There is a possibility we could start this fall. The public involvement period will begin June 1.

We have met with the Highway Department over recreational access issues. A continuing problem is that when we have an easement and develop a FAS and they later want to widen the road, they are required to mitigate for the loss of recreation. From now on FWP will be required to mitigate for any loss of recreation on MDT sites.

Although there has been publicity that the FAS is getting rid of sites, they are actually sites that are not in use and are sometimes landlocked properties such as land donations, easements, etc. It is important to get the word out that we are not trying to get rid of active FAS. Attached is a list of sites under review.

In many cases privately owned lands are being sold and because of high land prices, our acquisition budget does not allow us to purchase them. On some of the sites that are under review we do not have the budget to keep up with maintenance costs. Some organizations are looking at the Adopt a Site Program. The problem is that this goes well for a short time, but club members change and lose interest.

SB 130 is a bill in the Legislature this session which would add \$2.00 to the conservation license with the money earmarked for state trust land beneficiaries to cover impacts associated with hunting and fishing for management expenses such as weed control, etc.

Illegal Transport/Introductions – Chris Hunter

The current policy was distributed along with case examples of where there have been documented illegal introductions. This year we intend to do more work in this area and are interested in working with the different organizations. Jim Vashro has a database on illegal introductions with over 400 introductions documented in the state.

In our opinion it is actually a bigger issue than whirling disease because whirling disease affects only salmonids and illegal introductions affects all species. The main area where we can make some progress is through education and that is where we need the help of organizations. Mark Henckel of the Billings

Gazette agreed that a news story about the implications of illegal introductions and how it affects warmwater species might be beneficial. Chris has also written to fish chiefs from surrounding states and asked for ideas on what they are doing to address the problem. The following suggestions were also discussed at this time:

- Focus on kids, i.e., Missouri River Adopt a Fish program on WU website or the Adopt a Trout program on the FWP website. We are in the process of expanding the FWP webpage for Fisheries under Planning A Trip.
- Public service announcements on radio.
- Use of bumper stickers.
- Fergus the Fish.
- Advertise the check out a rod program.
- Teaching Trunk – we have one but it does not necessarily center on Illegal Introductions.
- Improve urban fishing opportunities on the ground, not only in school rooms.
- Explore angling groups activities centering on youth, i.e., Jr. Bassmaster's Club.
- Articles in Outdoor sections of daily newspapers.

There was discussion on what motivates some of the illegal introduction activities and what can be done to educate the public about this problem:

Motivation

- Anger with current management or apparent lack of management for warmwater species. (example: Tiger muskies in Horseshoe Lake).
- Justification – since FWP does not manage for warmwater species in the western district, somebody has to do it. The reduction on limit for spearing northern pike on Echo Lake was a good step. Spearing was taking too many big fish.
- Frustration – some anglers see warmwater fisheries as viable and self-sustaining in the western part of the state, but FWP does not acknowledge it.
- Some anglers believe that if you planted closed basins it could reduce the amount of illegal introductions going on, although the experience in R-4 was that it did not stop illegal introductions.
- Not everyone wants to fish for trout – anglers want more diversity. Many anglers will fish for whatever they can catch.
- Department spends fishing dollars to make an improvement on a body of water then management states that fishing is not important and it should be managed for recreational boating (Horseshoe Lake).

What the Department Could Do

- Add a supplement to publications that are already in place documenting what is being done in the warmwater area so that people will become more aware of efforts that are already underway. It is important to get the message out.
- Be pro-active – be region-specific – instead of just saying “no” be willing to explore possibilities and explain “why” warmwater species won't work in a certain body of water.
- Look at places to stock and/or habitat improvement activities.
- Start analyzing fish species on angler survey forms.
- Work with groups to design survey questions and conduct surveys.
- Education component in SB 287 – could be a funding source for surveys.

- Distribute Fisheries survey to random sample to license buyers using ALS system.
- Hire an independent business to conduct angler surveys. Ask Parks who they use. Ask what anglers fish for.

The Fisheries Division is committed to developing a significant education program to prevent illegal introductions over the next year.

The Warmwater Coalition from Region One was represented at this meeting. This is a group of sportsmen whose objectives are to work to strengthen the warm and cool water management plan and recognize the value of, and interest in the warm water fisheries for Region One. They distributed materials which included:

- A list of 18 possible closed-basin lakes that could be managed for warm or cool water fisheries;
- A survey showing angler interest in warm vs. cold water fish – majority of people want to fish for both species.

Some suggestions that were discussed at this meeting included:

- Provide an optional questionnaire - when a person buys a license to gather information. Try it for one year and compare data to existing angler surveys.
- Look at statewide survey – use of different fisheries and add into the six-year planning process.
- Need to adjust coding of waters – they are listed as trout waters, but actually they have warmwater species.
- If there are efforts to manage warmwater species we do not see it from the statistics that are presented.
- There have to be some restrictions, but there are areas where it would not make a difference.
- We want to know that concerns are being addressed.
- When warmwater plan is revised we could add surveys for what kind of fish people are interested in fishing for.
- Clubs would be willing to provide anglers survey data for the Department. There could be an interaction in collection of data.

The main issue with the Warmwater Coalition is that the fish are already there – manage the fish. Can we enhance bass west of the divide?

Hatchery Allocation

Stocking records for the past 10 years and 2003 Stocking Plan are now on our FWP website under Fishing, Hot Topics.

There was discussion on distribution of bass. We have 10 age classes of bass in Miles City. Once the Fort Peck Hatchery is built we may raise bass there. It might be more cost effective to bring bass in from other states, but with the disease issue we may find it is better to raise them at Fort Peck.

Regulation Setting Schedule

In order to start the process of simplifying and streamlining the fishing regulations, a group of 20 FWP employees from across the state began meeting last fall. They discussed regulation issues that the public finds confusing and ways to make them easier to understand. Some of the items discussed included:

- Revising statewide standard limits to provide more consistency.

- Definition of attended vs. unattended lines.
- Ice fishing shelter regulations.
- Looking at bait regulations.
- Looking at standard exceptions to make fewer varieties of exceptions.

Public meetings will be scheduled in the regions to review proposed regulation changes and they will go to the FWP Commission for their approval in May/June. The public comment period will be open during July and August and the final regulations will be presented for adoption by the Commission in October.

Karen distributed DRAFT format changes to the group for their review.

Some of the comments discussed at this meeting included:

- Cut back on daily and possession limits on bass or consider slot limits in western district.
- Make sauger a 1 fish limit statewide.
- Allow catch and release on paddlefish on Yellowstone instead of the limited catch and release regulations in place now.
- Slot limits or bag limits on bass. We have to go through the Fish and Wildlife Service whenever we change bass limits west of the Divide.

Proposals from Montana Pikemasters – Billings:

- Slot limit or lower limit on daily and possession - 35-40" slot limit – 5 fish per day and stop spearing on Fort Peck.
- During tournaments all fish must be released unharmed. They have observed a lot of fish being killed when they are being handled for weigh-in. Fish should be weighed at the water's edge, not at the marina.

Other concerns were that Region One has opening for cutthroat trout prior to completion of spawning. If you have additional comments or concerns after reviewing the DRAFT, call or e-mail Karen Zackheim or talk to your regional fish managers.

Meeting adjourned.

Warmwater Annual Meeting Attendees

Organization	Name	E-Mail	Phone
FWP	Karen Zackheim	kzackheim@state.mt.us	444-3301
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FWP	Steve Leathe	sleathe@state.mt.us	454-5855
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Capital City Bassers	Rick Smith, Jr.	basstocker@yahoo.com	227-6350
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